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ABSTRACT

Examining the role of Clemson University's Cooperative Extension Service in the planning stages of a Title V Community and Resource Development (CRD) program in South Carolina's rural Williamsburg County, this paper describes the Extension's 14-month involvement. The following specifics are addressed: (1) South Carolina's Title V program (staffed by a county agent, a CRD specialist, and a rural sociologist working toward the objective of leadership development); (2) the Extension's involvement in planning a human services complex (emphasis on interagency coordination); (3) project scope (creation of a human services complex comprised of the County's primary health and social service agencies); (4) planning objectives (Extension's role in formulating preliminary planning information to facilitate decision making); (5) planning process (use of traditional planning processes within the Extension CRD philosophy of providing education, information, and technical assistance); (6) planning results and followup. Demonstrating that planning and supportive activities are an integral part of the social action process, this paper details the Extension's role in consultations; information gathering; preparation of materials; and integration of educational components (problem identification, citizen participation, planning strategies, resource mobilization, etc.). (JC)

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The Extension Service as a Resource in Planning at the Local Level*

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Introduction

Title V of the Rural Development Act of 1972 very clearly challenges the responsible institutions to design and implement effective rural development programs (Clark, 1975: 96-99). While many argue that the three-year time limitation of the Rural Development Act plus the failure at the Federal level to fund or implement parts of that legislation will severely restrict the possibility that any significant contribution toward rural development will be made, the challenge nonetheless stands. In that sense, those of us directly involved with Title V activities need consider how to best utilize those limited resources in the short run to build on our capabilities to identify and deal with the questions associated with rural development. However limited those resources, we can in fact contribute toward expanding our knowledge base by explicitly stating the theoretical underpinnings of our efforts and by sharing research findings as well as experiences acquired in testing research and Extension methodologies and techniques. Community and Resource Development[1] is somewhat the orphan child as a program area in Extension when compared with the more traditional program areas of agriculture, home economics and youth work. As such, most states are still experimenting with ways of effectively integrating the CRD program with other Extension programs at the local level. Specific programs or projects evolving as a consequence of the Title V legislation should offer us yet another -- and to some degree unique -- opportunity to evaluate various alternative approaches for establishing viable CRD Extension and research programs at the local level.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly review Clemson University's goals and objectives in relation to the Title V program in South Carolina and to describe how the research and Extension components have been effectively integrated in responding to a request for assistance in verifying the feasibility of and planning for the establishment of a human services complex in a rural South Carolina county.

Title V in South Carolina

The Title V program in South Carolina is organized around the assumption that a major barrier in rural development is that recognized and potential leaders[2] lack the social skills and technical information necessary to contri-

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[1]The designation Community and Resource Development will subsequently be abbreviated CRD.

[2]Potential leaders as used here refers to persons who either are interested in participating more actively in community decision-making but lack the necessary skills or are recognized as being influential but lack the motivation to participate more actively.

bute in a more significant manner to community development type efforts. The primary objective of the Title V program therefore is to identify leaders and potential leaders and capacitate them in the skills associated with a leadership role in community development. A complementary objective is the "provision of information and technical assistance to citizens, local leaders, and agencies and organizations that play an important role in the development of the county" (Clemson University, 1975: 1). The long-range goal of a program organized around these objectives is clearly in line with the directives for community and resource development programs provided by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, that of increasing the community's "effectiveness in making and implementing decisions concerning improvements in the quality and level of living of people" (ECOP, 1966: 2).

During the first fiscal year, the Title V Project in South Carolina was staffed with an Assistant County Agent and a Community and Resource Development Specialist assigned to Williamsburg County, the target county, plus a Rural Sociologist located on the Clemson University campus. In the selected target county, leadership and problem identification surveys were conducted, along with a survey of some twenty-six organizations considered to have a role to play in the development of the target county.[3] A wide range of activities were subsequently undertaken, ranging from organizing program committees to facilitate citizens input to providing direct assistance to the local Housing Authority in formulating a low-income housing project.

Extension Involvement in Planning a Human Service Complex

One of the individuals contacted in the previously-mentioned organization survey was a member of a county-wide health commission, a voluntary group made up of persons involved with providing medical services locally and organized to review health care needs and formulate policies and programs to meet those needs. After conferring with other members of the commission, this person submitted a formal request for planning assistance to the CRD Specialist in the target county. The request stated that the commission was interested in the possibility of developing a coordinated community health center which would bring the county's primary health care providers in close proximity to the County Hospital and to each other and thereby gain efficiency and facilitate the referral process. Interest was expressed in exploring the feasibility of the idea and in generating information concerning alternative courses of action which could be considered in developing such a center.

The question raised immediately was: Is this type of planning assistance congruent with the mission of the Extension and research components in CRD and more specifically, the goals and objectives of Title V of the Rural Development Act of 1972? Referring to explicit statements, Title V legislation proposes "to provide research and investigations in all fields that have as their purpose the development of useful knowledge and information to assist those planning, carrying out, managing, or investing in facilities, services, businesses, or

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[3]For more details concerning the plan of work, selection of target county, and early phases, see Clemson University, 1974; Clemson University, 1975; and Jacob, et. al., 1975.

other enterprises, public and private, that may contribute to rural development" (Clark, 1975: 96). In principle, Title V projects are clearly authorized to provide planning assistance under the condition that information generated and activities undertaken are done in such a manner as to support and complement the activities of local groups which are contributing to rural development. In other words, by placing major emphasis on the educational component which is integrated with the technical assistance in planning, Extension involvement is clearly justified and called for.

The next step in judging the appropriateness of Title V project involvement in this type activity was to verify whether there was available to the local group requesting assistance a more appropriate source of assistance. The multi-county professionally-staffed planning council (Council of Governments) was consulted concerning this request by the Health Commission (the requesting agency) and by CRD professionals. Not being a project for which the planning council could undertake major responsibility within the reasonable future, it was decided that Clemson University would assume major responsibility for research and planning, in consultation with the regional planning council and the relevant local planning bodies -- the town and county planning commissions.

Scope of Project

After the Cooperative Extension Service had agreed to provide planning assistance, an initial meeting with representatives of the Health Commission was arranged. At this time specifics of the request for assistance were discussed.

In brief, the Health Commission visualized a campus approach to health care and social services in the town of Kingstree (population of approximately 3,500), the county seat of Williamsburg County, through the creation of a human services complex, containing the County's primary health and social service agencies. These include the presently existing County Memorial Hospital and Physicians' Office Building, both relatively new. Additionally proposed are the County Health Department, Department of Social Services, Mental Health Center, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Agency, and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Other related agencies would possibly be added later as a need arose.

The Commission felt that by grouping these agencies having strong program, client, and/or staff relationships, the convenience and quality of service to county residents would be enhanced. This would result from the reduction of client transportation problems, increased inter-agency staff communication, increased walk-in client attraction through greater agency visibility, reduction in cost of services through sharing of certain common facilities, and better facilities for those presently inadequately housed.

Planning Objectives

It was agreed that Extension CRD would provide assistance in formulating preliminary planning information necessary for decision-making and guidance in further project development activities. Some of the determinations felt to be necessary for this purpose included: how adequate or inadequate were existing

agency facilities; projected needs and area requirements for new facilities; the relationship between the proposed agencies in terms of clients, staff, and programs; site analysis in terms of location, land area, ownership, and traffic considerations.

Other important though less tangible considerations to be investigated included the attitude of agency officials at the local, district, and state level towards the proposed campus and the attitude of local government officials and other related agencies having interests in the planning or operation of the campus.

Planning Process

To satisfy these identified planning objectives, a planning process was employed which sought to incorporate traditional planning and design technical processes within the framework of Extension CRD philosophy of providing education, information and technical assistance to improve decision-making processes supporting collective actions of people to improve their community (Carroll and McLean, 1975). Following a series of meetings organized to clarify the role of the Extension Service vis-a-vis the requesting agency and local and regional planning bodies, planning activities coordinated by CRD administrative staff and specialists assigned to the project were begun immediately. The initial broad-scope planning framework developed consisted of two phases; phase one, the development of a campus design program, and phase two, the use of the design program in generating an architectural planning and design concept. This initial planning framework was, in essence, adhered to although modified in application during the plan development process.

Initial project planning activities -- including the development of planning guidelines, contacts and interviews with agency representatives and public officials, data collection, and preliminary project feasibility analysis -- were carried out almost exclusively by CRD specialists. Following these initial activities, consultant architectural services were obtained to assist in interpreting agency and community goals and objectives in terms of physical design and site planning criteria.

Further design programming and design development activities were accomplished through collaboration between CRD specialists, agency spokesmen, and the consultant architects. These activities consisted of additional interviews with agency representatives, additional data collection and analysis, and joint work sessions with participating agency representatives at which information collected, assimilated and synthesized, was presented through diagrams, sketches, slides and similar means to determine implications for the design of the project. Feedback was received during discussions at these meetings and differences resolved.

Extension CRD objectives pursued in developing the project reinforced those of the technical planning process. In phase one, the formulation of the campus design program consisted of numerous activities involving the provision of information, education and technical assistance. Among these were meetings locally with agency representatives, public officials, county and municipal planning commissions, and civic leaders to explain the proposed campus concept and determine attitudes towards its feasibility. Also, the CRD staff participated

with the multi-county Planning and Development Council's (COG) planning staff in initiating technical aspects of the planning process through the formulation and administration of preliminary planning information survey questionnaires, and by reviewing existing planning studies for information affecting the project area. Finally, CRD professionals were directly involved in planning of and participating in progress report meetings held at specified intervals during the conduct of project planning activities.[4]

Planning Results and Follow-up

Through this process a final planning product resulted consisting of a report containing proposals relating to project ownership, management and financing, alternative physical development strategies, and recommendations pertaining to design, site planning considerations, and suggested follow-up.[5] As an accompaniment to the report, models of each of the four proposed alternative development strategies were built to generate interest and assist in project promotion activities.

A final presentation of the planning results was held with representatives present from the participating agencies and local government and interested citizens. The planning results were enthusiastically received and acknowledged to be in accordance with the objectives of the various participating agencies and the community as represented by their planning interests on the city, county, and regional planning commissions. At this meeting a project development committee was formed. This committee, consisting of representatives from each agency, has been charged with the task of coordinating further campus development activities including project promotion, fund seeking for contractural planning, design and construction services, and interagency coordination throughout the project development process.

It was acknowledged that with these results, the initial request for assistance through Extension CRD Title V efforts had been in substance satisfied. Further project development responsibilities were delegated to the project development committee through parliamentary action. It is envisioned that the committee will agressively pursue project development activities suggested while maintaining flexibility to respond to changing planning conditions as they might occur.

Although formally having satisfied the Health Commission's request for assistance, it is expected that Extension CRD expertise will remain available to assist where appropriate to insure continuing progress in development activities.

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[4]Specifics concerning the techniques employed in collecting relevant information, including copies of research instruments, and a summary of information collected can be obtained by contacting the senior author, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Barre Hall, Clemson University.

[5]Copies of this report can be obtained on loan from the senior author.

Summary and Comments

The Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service played a somewhat unique role in responding to the request for planning assistance described in this paper. While the authors do not wish to suggest, implicitly or explicitly, that Extension can or should be involved directly and on a continuing basis with planning activities at the local level, the point that planning and supportive activities are an integral part of the social action process is clearly demonstrated in the decisions that were made and the action taken in carrying out an essentially planning function.

Some fourteen months passed from the point in time when the official request for assistance was received and the presentation of the final report and scale models of the proposed alternative planning strategies. During that time, a considerable amount of staff time was spent consulting with local and regional planning groups, collecting and analyzing information, and preparing written materials and accompanying materials. An effort was made throughout the execution of the project to effectively integrate various educational components, ranging from the process of problem identification and analysis, techniques for citizens' participation, organization and planning strategies, to and including, to some extent, resource mobilization. The planning strategy was explicitly stated to the various individuals and groups involved. In addition, numerous individual contacts were made at the county, regional, and state levels to collect and verify information and review progress. Approximately six meetings were held with participating agencies and planning groups during the course of the project in order to update the participants and gain their input. These various activities, plus the fact that the county's newspapers and radio stations provided ample coverage on a continuing basis, proved to be a reasonably effective method of promoting citizen participation in the planning process.

In judging the appropriateness or utility of Extension involvement in activities of the nature described in this paper, one need seriously consider the long-term effect of the involvement on the community in terms of knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations[6] changes which result as a consequence of this involvement. No systematic benchmark data are available other than what was collected in the early stages of the initiation of the Title V Project in the county.[7] While a follow-up of those studies is planned near the end of the third year of the Project, we will not be able to go beyond speculation in terms of evaluating the effect of Extension inputs associated with this particular project on any changes recorded.

In that virtually all activities generated in response to the request for assistance were directed to the planning phase[8] of CRD, evaluation of the

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[6]Bennett and Nelson (1975) discuss in detail how "KASA" change fits in terms of the overall change (CRD) process. This source provides some refreshing and useful insights into the CRD process and its components.

[7]See Jacob, et. al. (1975) for a summary of this data collected in the target county.

[8]Bennett and Nelson (1975: 5) identify three general phases of CRD: planning, specification, and implementation.

substantive development resulting from the Extension inputs can only be possible based on whether or not the community implements part or all of the suggested plan.

Extension CRD cannot choose to ignore the planning function as an integral part of rural community development. An impcrtant question begging attention before we can deal with the issue of how effective Extension CRD programs can or will be in promoting or stimulating rural community is: How can we best integrate the educational programs of Extension with the various planning activities carried out at the local and regional levels so as to gain maximum efficiency in terms of benefit to our clientele? Whether the approach described in this paper will contribute to the answering of that question or only serve to cloud the issue remains to be seen.

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